



## ḲAMSA TRIBE

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**ḲAMSA**, a tribal confederacy in Fārs province. As Vladimir Minorsky pointed out, the leadership of a tribal confederacy is “either taken by the dominant family of one of the clans, or may be supplied by some enterprising group coming from outside” (Minorsky, p. 391). The Ḳamsa tribal confederacy is a typical case of the latter.

In the 19th century, the Qashqā'i (Qašqā'i) tribal confederacy was so powerful that, at times, it was able to defy the authority of the central government. The Qashqā'i also represented a constant threat to law and order by their widespread raids in southern Fārs. Moreover, one of their chief sources of revenue was the imposition of tolls on passing caravans, especially along the Shiraz-Bušeher road, which was a vital artery of trade with the outside world. These raids and tolls (which included the *rāhdāri*, a kind of protection racket, and the *'olufa*, the traditional levy for fodder) were a perpetual irritant to British and Persian merchants. Thus the Persian government was under unrelenting pressure from the British consuls in Shiraz, as well as by Shirazi merchants, to provide a solution to the problem.

In 1861/62, the governor-general of Fārs, Solṭān-Morād Mirzā, tried to curb the power of the Qashqā'i by founding a rival tribal confederacy in Fārs. Five large tribes which had been loosely associated with the Qashqā'i tribal confederacy and which raided less important routes, were grouped together in a confederacy called Ilāt-e Ḳamsa, or Five Tribes (*ḳamsa* meaning “five” in Arabic). They were then made wards of the Qawāmi, the richest merchant family in Shiraz, whose heads were the hereditary *kalāntars* (mayors) of



Shiraz and bore the title of Qawām-al-Molk. Therefore the creation of the new confederacy also substantially increased the strength of the Shirazi merchants. The first *ḥākem* (chief) of the Kamsa tribal confederacy was Mirzā ‘Ali-Moḥammad Khan, a grandson of the famous statesman Ḥājji Ebrāhim Khan E’temād-al-Dowla (q.v.). He was also made governor of Dārāb (Fasā’i, I, p 320; II, pp. 47, 51, 201).

The five Kamsa tribes were the Bahārlu, Aynāllu, Bāṣeri, Nafar, and ‘Arab tribes. The ethnic origins and the census figures for 1932 for each tribe (Kayhān, II, p. 86-87) are as follows: [The Bahārlu](#) (Turkic; some 8,000 families); the Aynāllu, or Inānlu (Turkic; some 5,000 families); [The Bāṣeri](#) (mixed Persian, Turkic, and Arabic; some 3,000 families); The Nafar (Turkic; some 3,500 families); The ‘Arab tribe (see [‘ARAB IV. ARAB TRIBES OF IRAN](#), and as the name suggests, of Arabic origin; some 13,000 families).

Unlike the Qashqā’i *ilkānis*, who generally lived with their tribes and wielded absolute power, the Qawāmi were sophisticated urbanites from Shiraz, who usually contented themselves with making an annual tour of their realm for the purposes of inspection and punishment (for a description of such a tour, see Norden, pp. 155-57). Otherwise, they ruled indirectly, the allegiance of the tribal chieftains being encouraged by gifts of arms and protection against the encroachments of the provincial governors and other officials of the central government. Thus, as Fredrik Barth noted, “the confederacy seems to have been without any specific administrative apparatus” (p. 88). This system made it nearly impossible for the Qawāmi to impose any kind of discipline upon their tribal warriors, who continued their widespread depredations. Nonetheless, the acquisition of a tribal army by the Qawāmi did much to change the balance of powers in Fārs province.

From the point of view of the central government, creating the Kamsa tribal confederacy paid off handsomely, for, during the following century, the two rival confederacies were to be locked in a continuous and mutually debilitating struggle for supremacy in Fārs, which had the salutary effect of preventing the Qashqā’i from unifying all the tribes in the province and establishing a stranglehold on Shiraz. But it did little to alleviate brigandage and extortion on the vital Shiraz-Bušeḥr road.

Because the Qawāmi family’s business interests coincided with those of Great Britain, the Kamsa tribal confederacy generally supported British aims in southern Persia. When the Persian Revolution of 1906-1911 started, the official



*anjoman*, or revolutionary committee (see [ANJOMAN I.](#)) in Shiraz, which was dominated by religious elements, turned against the Qawāmi because the latter were too closely identified with the old regime and were regarded as stooges of the British. Taking advantage of this situation, Şowlat-al-Dowla, the Qashqā'i *ilkāni*, threw in his lot with the revolutionary forces. He thus gained a valuable political foothold in the provincial capital, the traditional Qawāmi stronghold, and, several times, his tribesmen marched into the city, where the populace gave them an ovation. In March 1908, the whole province was thrown into turmoil by the assassination of Moḥammad-Rezā Khān Qawām-al-Molk, the Qawāmi leader, and by an attempt on the life of his eldest son, Ḥabib-Allāh Khan (Oberling, 1974, pp. 77-81).

During the period of the Second Majles (Parliament, November 1909 to December 1911), the turbulence in Fārs became even more intense, and the Qawāmi, with their poorly trained town militia and ragtag nomadic army, barely held their own against repeated Qashqā'i onslaughts. In August 1910, the Qawāmi leader, Ḥabib-Allāh Khan Qawām-al-Molk, was appointed acting governor-general of Fārs. But he was not able to prevent Şowlat-al-Dowla from inciting a major riot in Shiraz in October of that year. The central government then decided to appoint Ḥosayn-ʿAli Khan Neẓām-al-Salṭana as governor-general of Fārs because, as a man “with large interests in South-West Persia... it was hoped [that he] would be able to keep the balance between the contending factions” (Wilson, p. 27). However, it soon became obvious that he strongly favored Şowlat-al-Dowla, and, as soon as he reached Shiraz in January 1911, he became embroiled in a fierce controversy with the Qawāmi.

In April 1911, Neẓām-al-Salṭana arrested Ḥabib-Allāh Khan, his brother, Naşr-al-Dowla, and several other relatives. In May, after having been dissuaded by the central government from executing the Qawāmi leaders, Neẓām-al-Salṭana sent them into exile. But their caravan was attacked by Qashqā'i forces near Kāna Zeniān, on the road to Buşehr. In the ensuing struggle, Naşr-al-Dowla was slain. Eluding his would-be assassins, Ḥabib-Allāh Khan returned to Shiraz. There, he sought refuge in the British consulate and pleaded with the British to help him regain the upper hand in the province, and the British who, by then, were convinced that the defeat of the Qawāmi would usher in a period of unparalleled chaos in southern Persia, reluctantly obliged—in spite of the fact that, according to the [Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907](#), Shiraz was in the neutral zone. In July 1911, they gave Ḥabib-Allāh Khan a substantial sum of money with which to raise and arm a new force. They also threatened



the Qashqā'i with direct military intervention if they did not withdraw from Shiraz. Finally, they were instrumental in setting up the Swedish-officered *Gendarmerie* to police the Shiraz-Bušeher road and other important arteries of trade (Oberling, 1970, pp. 50-79).

The rivalry between the Qawāmi and the Qashqā'i was further exacerbated by their choosing opposite sides in World War I. The British needed security in Fārs to protect their oilfields in Khuzistan (Kuzestān) and the approaches to Mesopotamia, where an invading British force was marching up the Tigris. Therefore they did everything in their power to back the Qawāmi. In fall 1915, they even succeeded in convincing the Persian government once more to appoint Ḥabib-Allāh Khan as acting governor-general of Fārs. On the other hand, the Germans wanted to sow disorder in the province so as to threaten the British oilfields and pave the way for a possible Turkish invasion of Persia. Accordingly, they sent one of their ablest agents provocateurs, Wilhelm Wassmuss, to Shiraz to entice pro-German officers of the *Gendarmerie* and other dissident elements to revolt against the British. In November 1915, the Germans staged a coup in Shiraz, in the course of which the British consul and eleven other British subjects were taken into captivity.

However, Wassmuss's triumph was ephemeral, for his support came mostly from the coastal tribes of Dašttestān and Tangestān, which were too far from Shiraz to be of much assistance. Moreover, the insurgents had carelessly allowed Ḥabib-Allāh Khan to escape to Bušeher, where he had found a safe haven at the British consulate. In February 1916, the Qawāmi leader set out for Shiraz with a large, British-supplied private army. Although he was killed in a hunting accident on the way, Ebrāhim Khan, his son and successor as Qawam-al-Molk and *ḥākem* of the Kamsa tribal confederacy, recaptured Shiraz. Ebrāhim Khan was then appointed acting governor-general of the province, and a new, British-officered Persian force, the South Persia Rifles, was organized to prevent another German coup.

After that, Wassmuss directed most of his energies to forming an alliance with the Qashqā'i and other tribes in central Fārs. Šowlat-al-Dowla was particularly susceptible to his appeal, for he still bore a grudge against the British for their support of the Qawāmi in 1911 and viewed the formation of the South Persia Rifles as a British scheme to solidify the power of the Qawāmi. But, by the time that he finally decided to take action in spring 1918, the war was nearly over, and British forces in southern Persia were at the peak of their strength. As a consequence, his tribal army was utterly defeated (Sykes, II, pp. 499-517).



By the end of the war, the Qawāmi had become the dominant political force in Fārs province. But, owing to their symbiotic relationship with the British, they were widely perceived as having betrayed the Persian nation, a sentiment which expressed in Abu'l-Faẓl Qāsemi's highly polemical work *Tāriḳ-e siyāh yā ḥokumat-e k̄ānvādahā dar Irān* (I, pp. 28-33).

At first, Ebrāhim Khan got along well with Reżā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-1941). When Norden visited Fārs in 1927, he was told that the Qawāmi leader “was the only overlord in Persia permitted to keep his rifles when the great order for disarmament was issued,” and that he was “a close friend of Reżā's” (pp. 153-54). But, shortly thereafter, he incurred the wrath of the sovereign, for the Ḳamsa tribes, in particular the Bahārlu and 'Arab tribes, played a major role in the tribal rebellion of 1929-30 (see Oberling, 1974, pp. 160, 163, 166-67; Bayāt, pp. 52-56, 71, 85-89). As a result, Ebrāhim Khan was forced to reside permanently in Tehran, where he was a member of the Majles, and, in 1932, his ancestral domains in Shiraz were confiscated by the central government. The Ḳamsa tribes were violently repressed and their insurgent leaders put in chains. Additional hardship was inflicted upon the tribesmen when their migration routes were cut. When Oliver Garrod visited Fārs in 1945, he observed that the Bahārlu had “sadly degenerated from the effects of malaria and the diseases bred in the cumulative filth of their settlements,” and that many clans of the 'Arab tribe were “in a miserable plight, having been reduced to a state of beggary and petty robbery” (p. 44).

Unlike the Qashqā'i, who, under the enlightened leadership of Şowlat-al-Dowla's four sons, were thoroughly revitalized after World War II, the Ḳamsa tribes never regained their former level of prosperity. When I interviewed Ebrāhim Khan in 1957, he told me that his tribes had shrunk to a mere 10,000 to 12,000 families.

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